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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000317

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: TURKEY/JORDAN: JORDANIAN PM BAKHIT FINDS BROAD AGREEMENT IN ANKARA

REF: ANKARA 0264

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

Summary

11. (C) Jordanian Prime Minister Bakhit, accompanied by Foreign Minister Khatib, came to Ankara January 16 to review regional issues prior to King Abdullah's planned visit to Washington, according to Foreign Ministry and Jordanian embassy sources. Bilateral trade issues were discussed as well. The Jordanian government is seeking an "enhanced and sustained" dialogue with Turkey on regional issues in particular. On Iraq, both sides reportedly stressed the need for a broadly inclusive Iraqi government and for continued efforts to keep the Sunnis on board. They expressed hope that Middle East Peace Process momentum would continue following upcoming elections in Israel and the PA; the Jordanians focused specifically on the need to give additional support to PA President Abbas. The two sides agreed Syria must cooperate with UNIIIC and expressed concerns over the effect of Syrian behavior on security and political stability in Lebanon. Bilaterally, Turkish and Jordanian officials committed to work harder to conclude a free trade agreement this year. Bakhit was Jordan's ambassador to Turkey until February, 2005 and maintains strong ties with senior GOT officials. End Summary.

Broad Agreement on Iraq, MEPP, Syria and Iran

12. (C) MFA Middle East Department Head Sedat Onal and a Jordanian embassy contact told us separately that the two sides found themselves in broad agreement on regional issues. The GOT characterized Iraq's elections, with greater Sunni participation and higher turnout than previously, as an important step forward. Turkey wants a broad-based government capable of producing reconciliation and national unity in Iraq, and Turkish officials highlighted to their Jordanian counterparts their particular concerns with Kirkuk's status, the situation of the Turkmen minority, and the sharing of natural resources. The Jordanians reportedly agreed and stressed in turn the necessity of keeping the Sunnis on board. According to the MFA, Bakhit worried that signals from the larger Iraqi parties that they did not consider the reform of the constitution a high priority threatened to disillusion Sunnis who participated after being promised their constitutional worries would be addressed early on.

13. (C) Turning to the Middle East Peace Process, the Turkish side noted the importance of Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and opening of the Rafah crossing, hoping that the roadmap would be revitalized after elections in Israel and the Palestinian territories. Turkish officials also briefed their Jordanian counterparts on the recent Turkey-Israel MOU whereby Turkey will manage the Erez Industrial Zone in Gaza (reftel). For their part, Bakhit and Khatib characterized PA President Abbas as the only viable option and said he needs additional support. The Jordanians also stressed the crucial role of the United States and the need for sustained U.S. interest in the peace process.

14. (C) Onal and the Jordanian embassy both told us that Jordanian and Turkish officials agreed Syria must cooperate with UNIIIC and both underscored the importance of Lebanon's sovereignty. Both sides expressed concern that Syrian behavior continued to cause security problems and disrupt the domestic political scene in Lebanon. On Iran, Turkish officials stressed the imperative for Tehran to rebuild confidence in the West and tone down its rhetoric. The Jordanians agreed but had little to add.

Still Working on Free Trade Agreement

15. (C) Onal and the Jordanian embassy agreed the two sides have no serious bilateral political differences. However, both countries believe bilateral trade, at under USD 300 million/year, is languishing at levels far below potential.

Efforts to conclude a bilateral free trade agreement continue but the Jordanians maintain reservations about opening their markets in certain sectors (NFI). The Jordanian embassy noted that Jordan is hoping Turkey will be willing to compromise on market access issues. Both sides anticipate resolving or bypassing remaining differences and concluding a free trade agreement in 2006. PM Erdogan highlighted Turkey's improved investment climate, with foreign investors now enjoying all incentives previously available only to domestic investors.

Turkish Embezzler in Jordan?

16. (SBU) Bakhit was reportedly asked at a press availability about the rumored presence in Jordan of fugitive Hakan Uzan and members of his family. The Uzan family is sought for corrupt financial dealings that led to the collapse of the Imar bank and the loss of billions of dollars. According to Turkish press reports, Bakhit acknowledged the Uzans came to Jordan as investors and received some kind of residence documents, which the Jordanian government has since revoked. Bakhit told the press he had no information on the Uzans' current whereabouts. The MFA told us the Uzan affair was not discussed officially with the Jordanian delegation.

Bakhit's Turkey Connection

17. (SBU) PM Bakhit was Jordanian ambassador to Turkey until February, 2005 when he was assigned as ambassador to Israel and subsequently became Prime Minister. According to the Jordanian embassy here, Bakhit maintains particularly good relations with Turkish officials and is personally committed to close consultation with Turkey on regional and bilateral issues.
WILSON